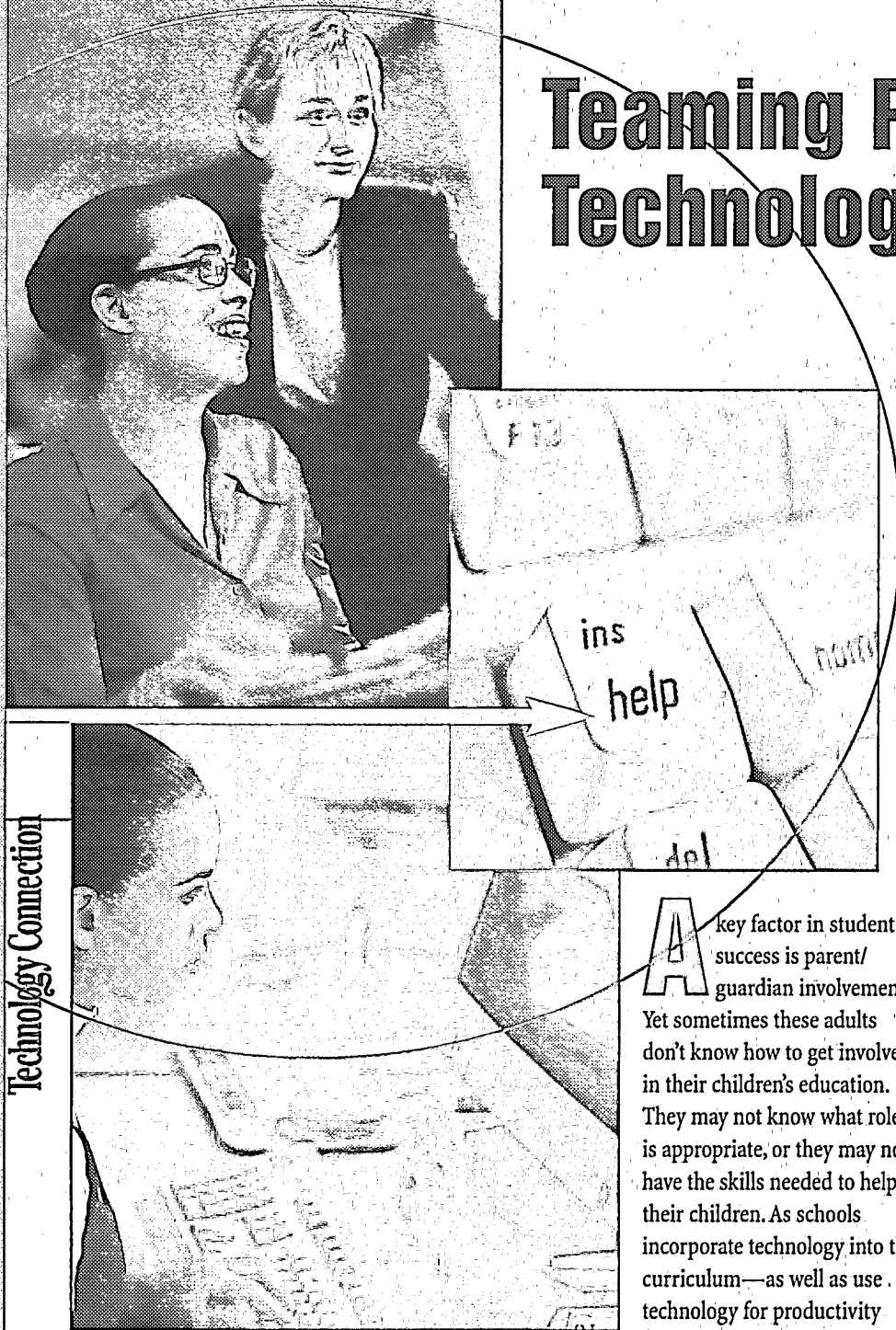


Teaming Parents with Technology

By Dr. Lesley S. J. Farmer



A key factor in student success is parent/guardian involvement.

Yet sometimes these adults don't know how to get involved in their children's education. They may not know what role is appropriate, or they may not have the skills needed to help their children. As schools incorporate technology into the curriculum—as well as use technology for productivity and other administrative

tasks—these issues of parent involvement become even more complex and problematic.

Because school librarians work with the entire school community, and network with other local community entities, they are well positioned to help facilitate parental engagement. Furthermore, with their knowledge of educational technology and strategies of collaboration, school librarians can assume leadership roles in teaming parents with technology.

This article identifies factors that influence parental involvement and describes ways that school librarians can help parents gain the skills needed to support their children's technological learning.

Levels of Parental Involvement

As back-to-school events, parent conferences, and cocurricular activities reveal, parental involvement may range from none at all to daily interaction. Epstein and other researchers have developed a five-level taxonomy of parent involvement:

1. *Family obligation*: providing a learning environment at home.
2. *Involvement at school*: serving as a volunteer.
3. *Home education*: overseeing homework and modeling high learning expectations.
4. *Decision-making and advocacy at school*: serving on governance boards and associations.
5. *Community collaboration*: serving as a spokesperson for the school within the community.

Most parents really want to be part of their children's education, but many obstacles can stand in their way.

► *Personal issues*: Parents may remember negative educational experiences. They may lack self-confidence, or think that they aren't educated enough to help. Their cultural values may conflict with school norms or discourage school involvement. In a few cases, some prejudices may stand in the way of getting involved.

► *Family issues*: Students may feel uncomfortable with close parental involvement, especially in high school settings. Parents may need to take care of other children or work long, inconvenient hours, thus limiting their time and energy for school involvement.

► *Logistical issues*: Timing, transportation, and child/elder care arrangements affect how parents can physically participate. In terms of technology, lack of equipment or telecommunications prevents remote

access to school resources. Additionally, language and reading barriers limit communication needed in order for parents to be involved.

School librarians who are sensitive to these issues can facilitate parental engagement. Indeed, technology can play a mediating role in this process. For instance, school librarians can help volunteers develop databases to facilitate car-pooling, child/elder support, and translation services. To facilitate collaboration and access, librarians can circulate Internet-ready computers to families. They can also keep in regular communication with parents through e-mail and listservs.

Working One-on-One

Probably the most time-consuming and intense way to involve parents in technology-related education is to work with them individually. School libraries constitute a technology-rich learning environment for the entire school community. School librarians are often "techies," and can incorporate technology training as they work with parent volunteers. Indeed, some parents may volunteer to work in the library in order to gain technological expertise.

Librarians do well to engage the volunteer's interest by showing how technology can help the parent on a personal level, such as buying a car or creating invitations. (These "hooks" need to lead to curriculum/library tasks; otherwise, the parent may be tempted to spend significant time on personal matters rather than in helping others access technology.) Other means that help parents learn technology include: guide sheets, Web tutorials, and a tech parent "buddy" (particularly popular and successful). Basically, school librarians need to provide resources, timely interventions, and general support—just as they would provide for other members of the school community.

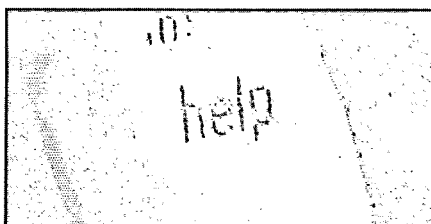
In some cases, librarians can use parent "virtual" help. Stay-at-home parents can produce print and electronic documents that may be transferred via telecommunications. They might be able to give homework assistance online or mentor students as part of career exploration activities. A

parent may even serve as the library Webmaster. The issue really is one of coordination, not technology.

Community-Wide Outreach Education about Technology

As the information center, the library can play to its strength: well-organized and accessible information in all formats. Relative to those resources, school librarians can also play to their strengths: instruction and collaboration. Depending on material and human resources, a wide range of possibilities exists.

► **Publications.** School librarians can write articles in parent newsletters about technology and mention Web sites that address parent issues, such as the American Library Association's (ALA) 700+ sites for families (<www.ala.org/parents/index.html>). Likewise, school librarians can include parent information on their library Web pages or the school Web site. Topics could include Web site evaluation, discussion about filtering software—and the need for family participation in Internet activities, such as virtual field trips, technology-related tutorials,



The librarian can build on existing parent education sessions hosted by the library, or create a new outreach service with technology as the calling card.

research project guidelines, online homework help sites, and parent support sites.

Schools and school libraries should also be encouraged to link their Web pages to other community entities, such as libraries, public health services, and governmental agencies. On a more sophisticated level, the library can videotape technology-infused learning activities or technology instruction to be broadcast on local cable community-access channels.

► **Guidance.** The simplest guidance is a FAQ sheet. It can be used independently as a reference tool, and requires little intervention. In some cases, school librarians may be able to locate such reference sheets on the Net or through networking with classroom teachers and other librarians. Peter Millbury's list of library Web pages (<www.school-libraries.net>) provides many potential sites that might include technology guide sheets and tutorials. Most college libraries have such reference documents on their Web sites, as does the American Library Association (<www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internettoolkit.html>).

Indeed, because of its international range, the Internet may be a good source for non-English guidance as well. School librarians may need to make sure that the instructions apply to local equipment, so a translation of English guide sheets may actually be more accurate. Even though electronic translation services can be problematic, most technical writing and directions use straightforward vocabulary and few idioms, so translation efforts are usually adequate (and may be reviewed by native language writers for accuracy).

When school librarians create these guides themselves, they can pilot test them with parents. Likewise, parents may be technical writers who can produce these guides for the school community. In both cases, parents serve a valuable, involved role.

► **Training.** Direct instruction constitutes the most personal and in-depth way to provide parents with the skills they need to help their children with technology-infused activities. Most schools have parent-teacher organizations (PTAs or PTOs) that provide an infrastructure for giving workshops for parents. School librarians might present technology tips as part of a PTA meeting or an ongoing

parent education program. Some schools offer parent mini-conventions where school librarians can present workshops. Librarians can build on existing parent education sessions hosted by the library or create a new outreach service with technology as the calling card.

Technology-savvy parents can coach members of the school community, including school librarians. If the trainers and the trainees have positive experiences, they'll spread the word in the community and foster more parental involvement. Because school librarians work in collaboration with others, they can also invite community technology experts to train parents, either in "live" or videotaped sessions. Videotaped sessions can be archived for parents, perhaps even through the use of streaming video.

Increasingly, distance learning—videoconferencing, e-mail "correspondence courses," and interactive Web courses—provides convenient ways for both librarians and parents to gain technological skills. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) offers free, real-time online training for parents through TappedIn (<www.tappedin.org>). School librarians can make these training opportunities known through the school's regular channels of communication.

Keeping Current

Of course, for school librarians to teach others, they need to be technologically competent themselves. Library conferences and district in-service workshops increasingly include such training. In California, InfoPeople offers training for all types of librarians, including ways to teach the community about technology. As mentioned above, parents can also coach librarians on needed technology. Being in the student's seat reminds one of the trials of learning a new skill and allows observation of coaching techniques (good and bad).

In a more textual mode, just as parents and the rest of school community can make good use of Web guide sheets and tutorials, so too can school librarians. In fact, it's a good idea to review all training tools prior to posting or publishing to eval-

uate the content and delivery.

Parent involvement in 21st-century education is more important than ever. Technology can feel daunting, separating parents from their children even more than they already may be. However, it can also be a vehicle to bridge generations through interdependence. No matter the level of involvement, from establishing a friendly learning environment at home to playing a key advocacy role in the community, parents can learn and apply technology skills to help their own children. When school librarians engage with families, technology in hand, they offer even more opportunities for families to engage in lifelong learning. **BR**

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Ask Mr. Technology

By Joe Huber

Q

Windows 98 hangs up on shut-down. What can I do?

A

The answer depends on which version of Windows 98 you are running: Windows 98 or Windows 98 second edition. To find the version you are running, go to control panel\system. The problem also depends on several other factors. In order to solve this problem, follow the instructions below, depending on which version of Windows you're running.

If you're running Windows 98, go to <www.microsoft.com> and search the knowledge base for article number Q196008 located at <support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q196/0/08.ASP?LN=EN-US&SD=gn&FR=0&qry=shutdown%20supplement&rnk=41&src=DHCS_MSPSS_gn_SRCH&SPR=W98SE>.

If you're running Windows 98 second edition, go to <www.microsoft.com> and search the knowledge base for article number Q238096 located at <support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q239/8/87.ASP>.



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